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ABSTRACT

Although large numbers of teachers are employed in the Catholic parochial schools, little information about their continuing education interests is reported in the literature. A mail survey of a systematic sample of 215 classroom teachers in the St. Paul-Minneapolis archdiocesan schools revealed high interest in such continuing education topics as new curricular developme.ts and the use of computers in the classroom and low or no interest in teaching the handicapped, multicultural education, and individualizing instruction. Differences were found among groups when teachers were grouped according to teaching level and age. (Author/JD)

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The Continuing Education Needs of Teachers in Catholic Parochial Schools

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Abstract

Although large numbers of teachers are employed in the Catholic parochial schools, little information about their continuing education interests is reported in the literature. A mail survey of a systematic sample of classroom teachers in the St. Paul-Minneapolis archdiocesan schools revealed high interest in such continuing education topics as new curricular developments and the use of computers in the classroom and low or no interest in teaching the handicapped, multicultural education, and individualizing instruction. Differences were found among groups when teachers were grouped according to teaching level and age.

The Continuing Education Needs of
Teachers in Catholic Parochial Schools

The purpose of this investigation was to gather information about Catholic parochial school teachers that would help a college of education plan its continuing teacher education program. A review of the literature revealed a paucity of research on the continuing education needs and interests of teachers in the Catholic schools. This study grew out of that lack. It was shaped by the following questions: What topics do Catholic school teachers want included in a continuing education program designed for them? When do they prefer to engage in continuing education activities? What factors discourage their participation? What demographic characteristics do they possess that might influence the development and the delivery of a continuing education program? Although drawn from one specific geographical area in the Midwest, the information gathered in the study should prove useful to departments and colleges of education and diocesan offices of education as they plan for the continuing education of teachers in Catholic parochial schools.

METHODOLOGY

The Sample

The Catholic Education Center of the Archdiocese of St. Paul-Minneapolis provided a current list of elementary and secondary schools and their staffs. The alphabetized list included 125 schools and 2,286 staff members. After one hundred and thirty-two non-teaching members (i.e., pastors, principals, nurses) were removed, 2,154 potential participants remained. From that list a ten percent

systematic sample was drawn, i.e., the first ten teachers on the list were numbered 1 through 10, a random number between 1 and 10 was generated, and the name of the teacher corresponding to that number and every tenth name on the list thereafter were included in the sample. The sample therefore consisted of 215 teachers.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire, selected as the information gathering tool, grew out of interviews with inservice teachers, a study of questionnaires used in previous local and national studies, and discussions with colleagues who are engaged in continuing education and inservice programs for teachers. After pretests and revisions the final form of the questionnaire sought information in six areas: (1) extent of interest in specific topics commonly offered to teachers in continuing education and inservice programs, (2) reasons for participation, (3) factors likely to discourage participation, (4) preferred instructional times and sites, (5) attitude toward career, and (6) demographic characteristics. Questions were phrased in closed form to facilitate quantification and analysis.

Collection and Analysis of Data

Questionnaires were mailed during the spring term. Follow-up mailings--one a postal card and another a second copy of the questionnaire--were made to encourage maximum participation. Participation was, of course, voluntary and those who did not wish to participate were asked to return blank questionnaires with such a statement.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyze the data. Measures of central tendency were calculated and tests of statistical relationship among variables (χ^2) were applied to

selected frequency distributions and crosstabulations.

THE FINDINGS

The information gathered in this study is divided into five areas: characteristics of the respondent group, reasons for participating in continuing education, factors which discourage participation, continuing education topics holding interest for teachers, and preferred instructional times and sites. The results are presented in such a way that the reader may consider the responses of (a) the group as a whole, (b) the group divided according to teaching level--elementary school, middle and junior high school*, and high school, and (c) the group divided into three age categories--under 35 years, 36 to 50 years, and 51 years and over.

Characteristics of the Respondent Group

Completed questionnaires were returned by 158 teachers or 73.5 percent of the sample. The respondent group included 137 women (86.7%) and 21 men (13.3%). The nonrespondent group included a larger proportion of both men and secondary teachers than did the respondent group but the differences between the two groups were not large enough to cause significant bias in the results. Women held advantage in numbers at all levels--97.6 percent at the elementary school level, 89.5 percent at the junior high school level, and 58.8 percent at the high school level.

The respondent group's median age was 35.7 years and the mean age 39.2 years. Both the mean and the median were higher for elementary school teachers (40.6, 38.5) than for junior high (38.2, 33.5) and

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* The term junior high will be used throughout this report to include both middle and junior high.

high school (37.8, 35.0) teachers.

The respondent group included 84 elementary (53.2%), 38 junior high (24.1%), and 34 high (21.5%) school teachers. The most commonly claimed teaching field for secondary school teachers was English (language arts, speech, reading) which included 19 teachers and accounted for 12.0 percent of the respondent group. Other fields represented by at least five percent of the total respondent group were mathematics (7.6%) and science (7.0%).

Eighty-two percent (82.1%) of the elementary teachers reported their highest degree as the bachelor's degree while 8.3 percent reported the master's degree and 2.4 percent a specialist certificate. Two percent (2.4%) indicated that they had no degree. Seventy-six percent (76.3%) of the junior high school teachers reported the bachelor's degree as the highest degree, 21.1 percent the master's degree, and 2.6 percent the specialist certificate. Forty-four percent (44.1%) of the high school teachers reported holding the bachelor's degree, 50.0 percent the master's degree, 2.9 percent the doctor's degree, and 2.9 percent other degrees. Less than one in ten (8.2%) was enrolled in a degree program. However, all of the teachers in the study reported earning additional credits beyond their highest degree.

The median number of years teaching experience was 10.4 and the mean 13.8. The median and mean numbers of years for elementary school teachers were 10.3 and 14.8, for junior high school teachers 11.0 and 13.5, and for high school teachers 12.3 and 12.5.

Forty-one percent (41.1%) of the teachers described themselves as the chief wage earner in the home; 22.8 percent reported that they held a second job during the school year and 39.9 percent reported

summer employment.

The teachers in the study generally expressed positive attitudes toward careers in teaching with 82.3 percent describing themselves as either satisfied or very satisfied. Ten percent (9.5%) reported a neutral attitude and 4.5 percent described themselves as dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. Three percent (3.2%) did not respond to the question. Although a larger proportion of junior high school teachers expressed more dissatisfaction than of their counterparts in the lower and upper grades did, over half (55.3%) described themselves as very satisfied. Fewer elementary school teachers (46.4%) and still fewer high school teachers (38.2%) described themselves as very satisfied.

Reasons for Participation

The participants in the study were asked to react to nine reasons for participating in continuing education: to satisfy requirements for relicensure, to increase salary, to earn credits toward an advanced degree, to improve teaching, to secure professional advancement, to prepare for a career shift, to satisfy an appetite for learning, to enrich life through learning, and to meet people and form new friendships. Respondents were asked to select one of three reactions to each reason: not important, slightly important, important.

Reasons most frequently checked as important by 40 percent or more of the respondents were to improve teaching (94.3%), enrich life through learning (75.9%), satisfy an appetite for learning (66.5%), and satisfy relicensure requirements (57.6%). The reason most frequently checked as not important was to prepare for a career shift (41.8%). (See Table 1.)

The teachers, divided according to teaching level, differed in

their reactions to only one reason for participation--to prepare for a shift in career. A career shift was checked as important by 36.8 percent of the junior high teachers, by 32.4 percent of the high school teachers, and by 16.7 percent of the elementary school teachers.

Dividing the group into three age groups--under-35 years, 36 to 50 years, and over-50 years--revealed different response patterns among the groups. Younger teachers were generally more likely than older teachers to list as important the following reasons for participation: satisfying relicensure requirements, increasing salary, earning an advanced degree, improving teaching, advancing professionally, and preparing for a career shift.

Factors Discouraging Participation in Continuing Education

The survey instrument contained a list of general factors that may act to influence teachers not to participate in continuing education classes, workshops, and conferences at a college or university: already have an advanced degree, the cost is too high, don't have the time, continuing education needs are best met in other ways, don't have any major continuing education needs at this time, the class schedule does not fit my schedule, my second job interferes, approaching the last years of my career and therefore have no reason to take more work, and child care is unavailable. (A list of factors relating to a specific institution were also included in the questionnaire but are not included in this report.) For each factor respondents were asked to select one of three responses: not a factor, a minor factor, a major factor.

Only two factors were identified by at least 40 percent of the group as major barriers to participation in continuing education.

Cost was checked as a major factor by 49.4 percent of the respondents and lack of time by 43.0 percent. (See Table 2.) The teaching level groups differed in their responses to one factor--already have an advanced degree--with 61.8 percent of the high school teachers, 36.8 percent of the junior high school teachers, and 26.2 percent of the elementary teachers indicating the factor to have minor or major importance.

Divided according to age, the groups responded differently to several items. More of the youngest teachers than the oldest teachers cited high cost (55.3% vs 30.3%) as a major factor influencing them not to participate in continuing education activities. More of the 35 to 50 year old teachers (51.1%) cited lack of time than did either the youngest group or the oldest group (46.1% and 27.3%). Members of the oldest group (33.3%) were far more likely to agree that having their needs met elsewhere was a major factor than were members of the youngest and middle age groups (3.9% and 14.9%). Finally, more of those in the oldest group (48.5%) cited the end of a career as a minor or major negative factor than did those in the youngest (3.9%) and middle (25.5%) groups.

Reasons that were rated as <u>not</u> a factor by at least half of the respondent group were no child care (79.1%), approaching the end of career (77.2%), second job (70.3%), already have an advanced degree (62.7%), and no present continuing education needs (52.5%).

<u>Topics of Interest to Teachers</u>

A major purpose of the study was to determine the level of interest in topics commonly included in courses, workshops, and conferences designed to meet teacher's continuing education needs and offered by colleges and universities. The respondents were asked to

indicate if they hold no interest, a little interest, or high interest in fifteen specific topics: classroom management, new curricular developments, improving general teaching skills, understanding today's children and youth, teaching the gifted, teaching the handicapped, individualizing instruction, teaching in the middle school, using computers in the classroom, special problems (e.g., censorship, benchmark testing, job stress, multicultural education, assessing student progress), and content areas (e.g., history, science, art). Topics checked as holding high interest for at least 40 percent of the respondents were learning about new curricular development (82.9%), using computers in the classroom (67.7%), improving teaching skills (65.2%), understanding today's children and youth (57.0%), managing the classroom (50.0%), assessing student progress (46.8%), learning more subject content (46.8%), and teaching the gifted (45.6%). Topics checked as holding no interest by at least 40 percent of the respondents were censorship (54.4%), benchmark testing (52.2%), and teaching in the middle school (49.4%). Other topics holding no appeal to large numbers of respondents were multicultural education (38.0%), dealing with job stress (29.1%), and teaching the handicapped (28.5%). (See Table 3.)

Sixty percent (59.5%) of the elementary school teachers expressed high interest in classroom management as a topic for continuing education while only 29.4 percent of the high school teachers did so. Middle and junior high school teachers, with 47.4 percent indicating a high interest, were more similar in response to the elementary teachers than to the high school teachers. The three levels differed also in their responses to understanding today's children and youth. Again, 64.3 percent of the elementary level teachers expressed high

interest in the topic while only 47.4 percent of the junior high school teachers and 52.9 percent of the high school teachers expressed such an interest. A third (34.2%) of the junior high school teachers expressed high interest in learning more about the middle school, but, as one might expect, it was a topic in which elementary and high school teachers expressed little interest.

Differences were found among the three age groups in their reactions to two topics--understanding today's children and youth and teaching the gifted. Eighty-two percent (81.8%) of the oldest group (56 years and older) expressed high interest in learning more about young people while 61.7 percent of the 36 to 50 year old teachers and 44.7 percent of the under-35 year old teachers expressed such an interest. On the other hand, 97.3 percent of the youngest group expressed some interest in teaching the gifted while 91.5 percent of the middle group and 72.7 percent of oldest teachers expressed such an interest. No interest in the topic was expressed by 21.2 percent of the oldest group, 8.5 percent of the middle group, and 1.3 percent of the youngest group.

Preferred Instructional Times and Sites

The questionnaire contained a series of questions listing alternative times and sites for continuing education activities. Time was defined in three different dimensions: quarter of the year, day of the week, and hour of the day. A series of options was presented for each dimension. For each option teachers were asked to select one of four responses: unacceptable time, possible time, best time, or only time.

Regular summer term during the first half of summer break was selected as the best or only instructional time by 55.7 percent of the

respondents. Special summer term was selected as best or only time by 48.7 percent and regular summer term during the second half of the summer break by 37.4 percent. Academic year terms were the least preferred times although over half of the respondents indicated the spring term (57.0%) and the fall term (55.7%) were possible times for instruction. Less than half (43.7%) indicated that winter term was a possible time.

Respondents indicated a slight preference for Tuesdays and Thursdays as days for instruction. Friday and Saturday were the least preferred days.

Responses to alternative times of the day indicate a slight preference for early evening hours over late afternoon hours. The former was checked as the best time by 33.5 percent of the respondents and the latter by 27.8 percent. An additional 32.9 percent checked early evening and 36.1 percent late afternoon as possible times. Daytime was either unrated or unacceptable to a large percentage of the respondents (69.0%).

Four instructional sites (a college or university campus, the local school area, an extension center, a retreat center for intensive workshops) and the media (television and radio) were presented to the participants who were asked to select one of four responses to each: unacceptable, possible site, best site, only option. These were selected as best in the following order: a local school area (52.5%), an extension center (48.1%), a retreat center (25.9%), a college or university campus (22.8%), and the media (20.9%).

The members of the group, divided according to teaching level, differed in their responses to one of the sites. While 63.1 percent of the elementary teachers checked the local school area as a best

site for instruction, 52.6 percent of the junior high school and 26.5 percent of the high school teachers did so. No differences were found among groups in their responses to instructional times.

Differences existed among the age groups in their responses to instructional times and sites. Although the younger and middle groups responded in very similar ways, the older group reacted very differently. Members of the older group were more likely not to respond to these items. The youngest and the middle years groups reacted differently from one another to extension centers as instructional sites. More teachers in the youngest group than in the middle group checked extension centers as the best site (61.8% vs 40.4%).

IMPLICATIONS

A continuing education program should provide a set of educational experiences which satisfy teachers' needs as teachers perceive them and, at the same time, as the schools perceive them. The success of a continuing education program rests in part upon the identification and satisfaction of both individual and institutional needs. A sound continuing education program must be based on hard data rather than hunches. This study, focused on teachers' perceptions, provides hard data but the reader is cautioned that the data must be considered against the backdrop of institutional needs. With that caution in mind, the following comments and suggestions are offered:

1. Responses to several items in the survey instrument such as those dealing with satisfaction with career, wage earner status, length of teaching service, and career shifts suggest that most teachers, particularly those at the elementary school level, are not

likely to vacate their present positions soon. Stability of staff, desirable as it may appear, carries with it the danger of decreasing teacher vitality. An aging staff with little or no turnover may find itself either unaware of or unreceptive to innovative practices. It is imperative that all paths to improved practice be kept open. Continuing education is one of the paths. Probably more than ever before it is an integral part of the work of the teacher.

2. Although generally altruistic as a group in their reasons for participating in continuing education, the reality of the world does intrude. Differences among the respondents surfaced when they were grouped according to teaching level and age. Twice as many secondary teachers as elementary teachers reported career shift and professional advancement as important motivators for participation in continuing education. A much larger percentage of younger than older teachers reported licensure requirements and salary increases as important. Since career shifts, professional advancement, licensure requirements, and salary increases are generally associated with college credit courses and degrees, secondary teachers and younger teachers are more likely to seek activities to which college credits and, ultimately, degrees are attached. Continuing education activities which do not carry college credits may not be nearly so attractive to teachers in these groups.

3. Cost of and time for continuing education were dissuaders most commonly cited by members of the respondent group as a whole. Differences were found among the age groups on these two items with the youngest teachers citing cost as a major dissuader and the oldest group citing lack of time. Tuition support in the form of scholarships, grants, or loans by the schools for those at the lower

salary levels may eliminate cost as a dissuader. On-site or near-site instruction may partially ease the time bind in which teachers are so often caught.

4. Nearly half of the oldest group of teachers (ages 51 years and older) indicated that approaching the end of their careers was a factor in their decision not to participate in continuing education activities. However, within the group this view was expressed more frequently by teachers in their early 50s and in their middle to late 60s than by those falling between these two subgroupings. This finding suggests that some respondents may not be viewing continuing education as a career-long process and that they may in fact be withdrawing from participation long before the end of their teaching careers.

5. The topics included in this study that hold the highest interest for teachers as a total group were new curricular developments and computers in the classroom. Other topics of substantial interest (in descending order) were improving teaching, understanding today's children and youth, classroom management, assessing student progress, learning more in the content area, and teaching the gifted.

Despite the importance placed on special education, multicultural education, and individualizing instruction today, large percentages of teachers indicated only a little or even no interest in teaching the handicapped (nearly 80%), in multicultural education (nearly 75%), and in individualizing instruction (nearly 70%).

6. Although teachers hold more similar than dissimilar interests and preferences for their continuing education, differences among teaching levels and age groups suggest that developing one program for

all teachers is not a good planning approach. Elementary teachers, for example, were more apt to express an interest in classroom management and understanding young people than were middle, junior high, and high school teachers. Older teachers were more interested in learning about young people than were younger teachers; younger teachers were more interested than older teachers in learning more about teaching the gifted.

SUMMARY

As a part of their planning process for continuing education, departments and colleges of education and staff development departments in the schools commonly ask teachers who participate in their activities to evaluate those activities and to suggest topics for future study as well as days and hours when the activities should be offered. Teachers generally reaffirm that the providers of continuing education are doing a good job of responding to their needs at times and places convenient for them. Those who participate feel that their needs are met. The participation of large numbers of inservice teachers in continuing education activities demonstrates that we are apparently serving the needs of many. Yet many more teachers are not participating. This study has provided an opportunity to communicate with that group. Accomodating to their concerns may encourage participation and help <u>continuing</u> teacher education become not only the partner of <u>preservice</u> education that it ought to be but also a powerful force in maintaining teacher vitality.

Table 1. Reasons for Participating in Continuing Education

	No Response	Not Important	Slightly Important	Important
	%	%	%	%
Improve Teaching	1.3	0	4.4	94.3
Enrich my Life	.6	2.5	20.9	75.9
Satisfy Appetite for Learning	0	3.2	30.4	66.5
Satisfy Relicensure Requirement	.6	22.8	19.0	57.6
Earn an Advanced Degree	1.3	29.1	30.4	39.2
Advance Professionally	1.9	20.9	43.0	34.2
Increase Salary	1.3	32.3	32.9	33.5
Meet People and Form New Friendships	1.3	27.2	42.4	29.1
Prepare for Career Shift	.6	41.8	32.9	24.7

Table 2. Dissuaders to Participation in Continuing Education

	No Response	Not a Factor	A Minor Factor	A Major Factor
	%	%	%	%
Cost	.6	10.8	39.2	49.4
No Time	2.5	13.9	40.5	43.0
Conflict in Schedules	4.4	41.1	31.0	23.4
No Present Need	1.3	52.5	31.6	14.6
Second Job Interference	3.8	70.3	11.4	14.6
Needs Met Elsewhere	1.9	41.8	43.0	13.3
Already have Advanced Degree	1.3	62.7	24.7	11.4
Approaching End of Career	3.2	77.2	11.4	8.2
Child Care Unavailable	3.2	79.1	10.8	7.0

Table 3. Interest in Continuing Education Topics

	No Response	No Interest	Little Interest	Major Interest
	%	%	%	%
New Curricular Developments	1.9	3.2	12.0	82.9
Using Computers in the Classroom	.6	11.4	20.3	67.7
Improving teaching skills	1.3	3.2	30.4	65.2
Understanding Today's Children and Youth	1.3	7.0	34.8	57.0
Classroom Management	1.9	12.7	35.4	50.0
Assessing Student Progress	.6	17.1	35.4	46.8
Content (E.g., history, science)	5.1	14.6	33.5	46.8
Teaching the Gifted	1.9	7.6	44.9	45.6
Handling Job Stress	2.5	29.1	35.4	32.9
Individualizing Instruction	.6	17.7	50.6	31.0
Multicultural Education	2.5	38.0	36.7	22.8
Teaching the Handicapped	1.9	28.5	50.6	19.0
Teaching in the Middle School	2.5	49.4	32.3	15.8
Censorship	3.2	54.4	33.5	8.9
Benchmark Testing	4.4	52.5	35.4	7.6

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